



MR. PRESIDENT, PULL THE PLUG: GET SAFER AND SAVE PRIVACY

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As soon as the [Cybersecurity Act of 2012](#) (PDF) failed in the Senate, speculation started that the [President will use an Executive Order](#) to put the legislation to use anyway. Putting aside the [massive issues](#) raised by using an

Executive Order to override the will of the Senate, it's not clear why we even need this legislation. There are two things that I find particularly troubling.

First, [the President has said](#) we need this legislation to protect our economy, its industries, and all citizens that rely on them. To support his argument he pointed to several hacks that happened recently, including one at a water sanitation plant. According to President Obama in an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal, a cyber threat to our nation is one of the most serious economic and national security issues the US faces. Why? The President explains that he conducted a simulation last month, in which hackers successfully inserted harmful software into the computer networks of our private industries, and as a result, "across the country, trains had derailed, leaking toxic chemicals into the atmosphere, and water treatment plants in several states had shut down, contaminating the drinking water of our citizens."

But [as Techdirt pointed out](#), each of the attacks he mentioned are attacks that could have been prevented without any new legislation at all. Why do we have computers controlling our water filtration on the Internet in the first place? The most surefire way to prevent a cyber attack isn't to increase the amount of information the government can access on individuals; it's to get more systems offline. I know, we live in an Internet age, and I'm not suggesting that every company or plant or organization should go offline, I'm just saying that unless there's some really good reason why sensitive systems have to be online, they shouldn't be. Computers have gotten incredibly cheap in the last 20 years. We now have more computing power on our phones [than NASA had in 1969](#). If a company needs to have an online system and an offline system it really shouldn't be a problem anymore.

My second issue with the Cybersecurity Act of 2012 is that the government still hasn't clarified WHY this legislation is needed. The new legislation would give private sector corporations (Microsoft, Google, etc.) the ability to share user information with the government, and would also make these corporations unaccountable for the type of information they pass along to the feds. The National Security Agency (NSA) already gathers an incredible amount of information on US citizens through methods such as wiretapping, but the government now wants the power to read our emails and chats, snoop through cloud storage, and view any personal information we have given to private companies in what we thought was confidence. Why does the government need this information, and how do officials plan on using it to protect our country? Furthermore, what law currently exists that blocks that kind of info-sharing. Until the government clarifies this, the Cybersecurity Act just seems like another excuse to spy on American citizens.

These laws are arguably more important than SOPA and CISPA as they would have a broader impact on the privacy of Americans, but they have gained far less engagement from the public. There is still hope, however,

because there is time left. The law is still being staunchly debated amongst government officials, so why not use this to our advantage and build a strong opposition to the bill. Do something before it is too late: write to your senator, start a petition, whatever it takes. Privacy valued in this country, defend it.

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